

Winter Tales by pookiestheone

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Summary:

Time to see if Christmas can work its magic.

1. Christmas Miracles

Author's Note:

Time to see if Christmas can work its magic.

Billy was having his usual shitty Christmas. He missed his mother more at this time of the year and seeing Susan and Max together didn't help. Even when she was alive they hadn't been a close family; at least not the three of them. As Neil was more than happy to point out, Billy had been a "mama's boy"; as far as Billy was concerned Neil was just a jealous, resentful asshole.

He sat quietly on the sofa while Max opened her presents - new gloves, fancy scarf, some girly stuff - he liked the look of that eyeliner which he knew she would never use - a couple of books; her grandmother had sent her an ugly sweater, but the twenty bucks tucked inside made it less so. Billy knew what he was getting - two cartons of cigs; he could tell by the size of the gift. He had stubbornly refused to tell Neil or Susan that he wanted anything, so he had no right to complain. Anyway, he needed cigs and he was low on money.

When they had been in California he would escape for most of the day, reappearing just in time for dinner. He liked to give Susan her due, she knew how to put together a Christmas dinner and he always went out of his way to tell her that rather than ignoring her as he did most of the time. If he were honest, Susan was all right, but she married Neil so she at least lacked good sense.

He helped Max get rid of the scattered wrapping paper then headed to the door to grab his jacket so he could get the hell out of there.

"Billy, wait." Max caught up with him as he was pulling his jacket off the hanger.

"What?"

"Will you take me to the arcade?" she asked quietly.

“What? Don’t tell me that hell hole is open today.”

“Well, I’m not going so I can stare through the locked door, am I.”

“And Susan says it’s OK?”

“For a couple for hours.”

“Well, I’m not bringing you back. Got things to do.”

“Sure you do. I’ll get a ride with Dustin and Steve. Neil and Mom know.”

“Jesus, not that Harrington again.”

“Steve’s treating. And don’t be a jerk, Billy. Don’t you think you fucked things up enough.”

“Watch your mouth, Red.”

“Oh, and aren’t you a fine one to talk,” she retorted as he put on her coat and wrapped her new scarf around her neck.

“I’m older. I get away with it.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she said as she followed him out and closed the door behind her. She slid into the car beside him as he started it and waited while it idled roughly.

“You should scrape those windows or you’ll get us both killed.”

“Jesus, you’re a nag.”

Billy climbed out, grabbed the scraper from the back and cleared a patch of windshield in front of the steering wheel before tossing it back into the car.

“There, happy?” He threw the car into gear and drove off.

“You’re still going to get us killed.”

“Get over it, Red.”

“Stop calling me that, William.”

Billy laughed.

“Yeah, OK, point taken.”

They drove for a minute in silence.

“Where are you going anyway? I mean it’s Hawkins.”

“Friends.”

“Since when do you have friends.”

“Hey, watch yourself.”

“Well? Is that freckle-faced asshole your friend? Tommy, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So you’re going to see him?”

“Yeah.”

“Right. You have no idea where you’re going, do you?”

“Just anywhere but there, that’s all.”

Max sat quietly, surprised that Billy had actually confessed something to her, even if it was small. He was a jerk, no doubt it had got worse since they moved to Hawkins, but she was starting to hope there might be more to him than that. Ever since the Byers’ house he had been, if not friendly, than at least not openly hostile. He took her places, bitched a bit about it, but still took her. He saw her with Lucas, but didn’t say anything. Only once had he left her to make her way home by herself after school.

“You could come into the arcade, if you want.”

“I don’t want.”

“So you’re going to drive around by yourself, smoking, for the rest of the day until dinner?”

“Maybe.”

They pulled up at the arcade at the same time as Steve was unloading his pack of boys. He looked up, saw who it was, and turned away.

“Did you see his face afterwards?”

“Yeah of course, so?”

“That’s you. That’s what you can do.”

“Seems to me that you managed to take care of me.”

“And if I hadn’t you’d be spending Christmas in jail.”

“Your point is?”

“My point, Billy, is you have no friends. You dumped the last girl you were going with a month ago probably because you didn’t care enough. You got nothing for Christmas. And you’re going to spend the rest of the day alone, wandering around Hawkins. You think California was better than this, but you’re still the same.”

Max got out of the car and stood with the door open.

“You had a chance. Hawkins could have been a new start.”

“Yeah. Tell that to Neil.”

“Jesus, Billy. Neil didn’t run the boys off the road. Neil didn’t break my skateboard. Neil didn’t try to kill Steve. I know how he is with you, the way he talks to you and I know he hits you.”

In other circumstances Billy’s look of surprise would have made her laugh.

“What? Do all three of you think I’m stupid? But you’re just like him - a bully who likes to control and hurt people. Is that what you really want? To be another Neil?”

“So you have me all figured out, do you?”

“Tell me I’m wrong. Or better, show me I’m wrong. How about

something small like an apology. Neil would never do that.”

“You want me to apologise for your skateboard? Fine. Sorry.”

“It would be nice if you meant it. And no, not to me. Start with the guys.”

“Those little shits?”

“How about Steve then. He was just trying to protect Lucas from a bully twice his size. He didn’t deserve that.” She looked over to where everyone was standing. “Screw it. I might as well be talking to the car.”

She slammed the door and ran towards the waiting boys. Billy watched as Steve gave everyone some money and then herded them all into the arcade. Slouching back in the seat, he lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply and then attempted a smoke ring. He was tired. Not much of what Max had said surprised him; it wasn’t like he hadn’t thought most of it himself. Even the bit about friends.

There was no one in Hawkins. Or at least no one he hadn’t burned all his bridges with. At one point he thought that maybe Steve might be, but in typical Billy fashion he had to be in control first, had to make sure Steve knew he was boss. That’s how he made friends. Once that was established he eased off. With people like Tommy he didn’t have to make an effort; his bullshit bravado was all he needed to draw them in, so they didn’t matter. But he hadn’t counted on Steve being stubborn and unimpressed. So he switched to being hostile, pretending he wasn’t worth the effort. Then came the fight. After that they steered clear of one another when they could. In basketball, where they couldn’t, they both tried to switch practice partners as often as possible.

Of course Billy always had an ulterior motive when he made friends, at least if he found the guy attractive. Sometimes it worked out, sometimes not. And he definitely found Steve attractive. Pretty boy just about summed it up. There had been that one time when he bent down to pretend to help him up that he thought he saw something - those damn eyes - but the moment passed.

He sighed, rolled down the window, and flicked the dying butt into a snowbank. He knew he didn't want to be like Neil, but he wasn't sure if he would ever be anything else. Maybe he was worse. Throwing the car into gear he started to pull away when it stalled. He tried to start it again and it just groaned. *What the fuck?* He waited a few seconds and tried again. It turned over but that was it.

"Goddam it! Goddam it! Goddam it!" He pounded the steering wheel in frustration. He got out of the car, lifted the hood, but he couldn't see anything out of place. The battery cables were tight, but that's all he could really check other than the air filter and it seemed fine. Slamming the hood down he stuck his hands in his pockets and kicked at a tire. It was too cold to walk, he could already feel his cheeks tingling, and he didn't have any money other than some change.

Looking toward the arcade he tried to decide if they had a payphone so he could call someone. *Tommy? Neil? God almighty not Neil, not if I can help it. At least it'll be warm in there.* He locked the car and trudged toward the door. The kid on the desk looked up from his comic book with disinterest.

"You got a phone?"

"Back of the hall, by the cans. Look for the exit sign. You gonna play?"

"What?"

"You gonna play any games."

"Sure." *Not fucking likely.*

"OK, no hitting or kicking the machines, no roughhousing, no swearing. Got it?" He pointed to the sign behind him which said exactly the same thing and went back to his comic.

"Fucking got it."

"Hey!" The kid looked up again.

"Oh right, no swearing. Sorry."

The place was larger than he expected and it was surprisingly busy. *Hawkins on Christmas Day*. He started to laugh. *And here I am joining in the fun*. He scanned above the machines for the exit sign, avoiding contact with anyone as best he could.

“Billy? What are you doing here?”

It was Max. *Of course it's Max. And one of her weird little friends. Lucas, naturally.*

“Fucking car. Need to call someone for a ride and worry about it tomorrow.” He looked around. “Where’s the rest of your... uh, friends?”

“Somewhere over there.” She pointed to the next row over. “Probably Pac Man, or Mario Bros. I’m going to try Tron.”

Billy had no idea what she was talking about, although Pac Man was familiar.

“And where’s your keeper?”

Max made a face. “If you mean Steve, try Mario Bros with Dustin.”

“You mean he plays this shit?”

“Sometimes.” Max shrugged and turned back to the machine and stuck her money in while Lucas eyed him suspiciously.

“Don’t worry, kid, I learned my lesson. I like my balls too much.”

“Billy!” Max warned without looking around. “Leave!”

As he turned away, he spotted the exit sign and headed toward it, but a loud shout of “Steve” made him detour. Sure enough there they were in front of one of the machines; Steve was laughing and Dustin was giggling uncontrollably. Better yet, Steve was wearing some crazy Santa hat, messing up his usually perfect hair. It was too good to pass up, but it was suddenly something more than just that.

“Merry Christmas, Harrington.”

They both spun around and Dustin instinctively stepped behind Steve. *Right, I have thirteen-year-olds frightened of me.*

“Hargrove.” Steve nodded curtly. “Slumming or here to play?”

“Dead car. Looking for the phone to see if I can get someone to pick me up.”

“Well, don’t let us stop you.”

“Nice hat.”

Steve went back to the machine without answering while Dustin glared at him for a few seconds before he joined him.

What did I expect? Billy turned, then stopped. *“How about something small like an apology?”* He knew that this was one of those moments that might change everything. Or he might just fall flat on his ass.

“I’m sorry, Steve.” He said without facing them, but loud enough for them to hear.

“What did you say?”

He turned to see both of them staring at him.

“I ...” It had been so much easier when he didn’t have to see him. “I’m sorry. For what happened at Byers’ house. For beating the shit out of you. For being an asshole.”

He lost his nerve and quickly turned and walked away without waiting for an answer even if there was going to be one. By the time he got to the phone he was shaking and he had no idea why. He fumbled his change, dropping it on the floor.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.” He knelt down to retrieve some that had rolled under a machine.

“What brought this on?”

Steve’s voice startled him and he jumped up, smacking his head on the casing of the machine.

"It's Christmas," he said as he rubbed his head. "Probably that hat."

Steve smiled briefly in response before crossing his arms and looking him up and down.

"You were an asshole long before that night."

"I know."

"So this makes everything all right then?"

"No. Maybe it's a start though. I ..."

"You what?"

"I guess I really don't want to be like someone I know after all. Not anymore."

"Well, whoever that is he's a fucking jerk."

"Yeah," Billy snorted. "I figured I could start with you. Haven't tried to kill anyone else recently."

This time Steve laughed out loud.

"Look, Billy, I still don't trust you."

"Why would you."

"So where does this leave us?"

"Better than we were? Maybe a place for me to cut the bullshit with one person and where you can find out if you can trust me. I can't promise I'm what they call reformed, though."

"Yeah, this isn't "A Christmas Carol", is it."

"I'll try."

"And I'll call you out on your bullshit as long as you don't hit me with a plate."

"Deal. Now let me see if I can get a ride."

“You can come with me when I take Max and Dustin home if you want.”

“Now, that’s going to take some explaining.”

“Christmas miracles, Billy. Christmas miracles.”

Notes for the Chapter:

I couldn't for the life of me remember what games the kids played or even if I knew, so I went with my own list. Other than that I apologise for none of the feel good Christmas cheer :)

2. The Twelfth Day of Christmas

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve finds he wants to know more about Billy and better sooner than later.

Billy looked out the window and saw that the street had finally been cleared again. The snow had stopped just before noon and he was impatient to get away. Since he hadn't bothered getting snow tires - or rather couldn't afford them - driving in a Hawkins winter could be a death sport, particularly for someone who had never driven in snow. Susan had harped at Neil about putting her daughter in danger; surprisingly he had listened to her and Billy would have the tires Monday. He and Max had already shovelled the driveway and the plow hadn't filled in the bottom again so he was finally ready to go.

"Max, get your coat, it's after two."

"Max, remember dinner's at six." Susan called from the kitchen when she heard the front door open. "And drive carefully."

"Yes, Mom, Billy knows. She's a worrier," Max added as she followed Billy to the car.

"She's your mom. All moms worry."

Max watched him as he unlocked the door and walked to the driver's side. Things had changed in the days since Christmas; nothing dramatic but Billy definitely wasn't as on edge anymore and that meant he didn't fly off the handle so easily. Dustin had told her about the apology and, while she found it hard to believe at first, she was beginning to think that's where it had started. It was the only explanation.

"So, where to today?" Billy asked as he pulled out of the driveway.

"Just the arcade."

"Again."

“Jonathan’s going to pick us all up and take us to the Byers’. Where are you going?”

“Uh .. friend’s place.”

“Tommy?”

“No.”

“Who then?”

“Jesus you’re nosy.”

“Sorry.”

They drove in silence for a minute before Billy spoke.

“Harrington’s, all right. I’m going to Steve’s.”

“Steve’s your friend?”

“Well, maybe not. Not yet. We’ll see after today.”

“So the apology ...?”

“You know about that?” He smiled in realisation. “Of course you do. Yeah.”

“Well, damn!”

“Yep.”

They pulled up at the arcade and Max got out. Just like Christmas Day she stood holding the door open, looking at him for a few seconds.

“I’m glad, Billy. Steve’s a good guy; you’ll find out. Sort of reminds me of Danny that friend of yours from back in California. I liked him.” She closed the door and walked to Jonathan’s car.

Billy watched as they drove off. He missed a lot about California - right now it was the weather - but he figured he missed Danny the most. Steve wasn’t Danny, he doubted he ever would be because

Danny was a lot more than a friend, but Steve seemed like the type of person to give him a chance. Just like Danny.

As he pulled into the Harrington's drive Billy realised he was nervous; he was never nervous. He had seen Steve a couple of times between Christmas and New Year's, but nothing planned. Then on Friday at school Steve had sat down to have lunch with him; something that got them both some odd looks. That was when he had asked him if he wanted to come over on the Saturday. When he asked who else would be there he was surprised, and secretly pleased, when he said just the two of them. At the door he tucked in his shirt and adjusted himself in his jeans before he rang the bell.

Steve smiled broadly when he opened the door. "You made it."

"Yeah. I would have called if I couldn't."

"Good, good. Just hang your coat in the closet and we'll go to the family room."

Billy kicked off his shoes and followed Steve down the hall.

"Your parents?"

"Off to Indianapolis for the weekend."

"So you're here alone."

"Not now." Steve walked to the bar fridge. "Beer?"

"Yeah ... uh, please."

"You know, Billy," Steve said as he handed him the beer, "there's no need to be all that polite. 'Please', really? That's not you."

"You've seen me. You want me to be like that?"

"No, I want you to relax. God, I never thought I'd be saying that to you."

"Give me a few more beers and we'll see."

Over the next few hours they talked and drank. Billy could tell that Steve was trying to piece together his story without insisting that he tell him. The lack of pressure, and the beer of course, did relax him which meant Steve got most of what he wanted. Or at least enough to feel he was starting to know him better. Still, Billy held back; he had trouble trusting anyone.

“So,” Steve asked as he went to hand Billy the fifth or sixth beer, “you want pizza, Billy boy.”

“Don’t call me that!” Billy jumped up from the couch and headed back down the hall toward the bathroom, leaving him standing in stunned silence. Everything up until that point had been going so well. He had found that when Billy wasn’t being a jerk he was funny. Among other things he had an impression of Tommy down perfectly, so much so that Steve was almost on the floor with laughter at one point. And he was more observant than people would have believed. He knew the politics of Hawkins High inside out and how to get around people to get his way. His story about Karen Wheeler had him open-mouthed with surprise; he had always wondered about her and now he knew. But now he wasn’t sure where they stood.

When Billy came back he didn’t look at Steve right away, just studied his hands as he sat down. Finally Steve spoke.

“Do you want that pizza?”

“Yeah,” he finally looked up. “Pepperoni.”

“You like mushrooms?” Steve asked as he got up to go to the phone.

“Sure. Double cheese?”

“Got it”

Billy watched Steve carefully as he ordered. Anyone else would have pushed him on his reaction, but he hadn’t.

“OK, forty minutes or so. Got us an extra large.”

“Good. How much?”

“My treat.”

“I can pay.”

“Didn’t say you couldn’t. You get it the next time.”

The momentary silence was awkward.

“My mom called me Billy boy.”

“Ah. She still in California?”

“She died.”

“Jesus. Sorry. I ...”

“You couldn’t have known. Just took me off guard when you said it. Maybe someday I’ll tell you about her. If you want, I mean.”

“Sure. When you feel like it.”

“Anyway, what happened to my beer.”

“Uh ...,” Steve looked around. “Looks like I put them back on the bar. Don’t remember that.”

“Well, we can’t drink them from over there.”

Steve sighed with relief as he went to get them. *Crisis avoided.*

By the time the pizza arrived they had finished the beers and Billy was standing rifling through the records at the stereo when Steve came back with it.

“These yours?” Billy waved an album in his direction.

“God, no. Do I look like a Simon and Garfunkle fan?”

“Never know, pretty boy.”

“Here, get this while it’s still hot.” He handed Billy a piece and a handful of napkins.

“What is it with the ‘pretty boy’ thing?” he mumbled around a mouthful of pizza.

Billy shrugged.

“You are, aren’t you? I mean the hair is a dead giveaway.” *And your fucking eyes*

“Hair? You’re a fine one to talk.”

“Yeah, but mine’s wild and untamed, just like me.”

“Fuck!” Steve almost choked as he swallowed.

“And you. Well, I heard one of the girls say ‘coiffed’. How much time you spend on that thing anyway?”

“It’s natural.”

“Ri-i-i-ght. I’ve seen you after a shower remember. It’s about as natural as my eyes.”

“Yeah. About that ...”

“Eyeliner.”

“Why?”

“Why not. My mom used to say they’re one of my best features so why not take advantage. You’d be surprised how many people they catch.”

“Farrah Fawcett.”

“What?”

“The hair. Farrah Fawcett and Fabergé Organics.”

Billy stuffed a piece of crust into his mouth and grabbed another piece.

“You’re secret’s safe with me.”

“You want another beer?”

“I have to drive home. In the middle of this white hell.”

“It’s not snowing now.”

“It’s still a white hell.”

“You could stay. The guest bedroom’s made up.”

“What? Steve and Billy have a sleep over. Sounds middle school to me.”

“Yeah, we could tell ghosts stories and talk dirty about girls. Call people and ask if their fridge is running. The offer of the bed is there, take it if you want.”

“Well, Max had a ride with Jonathan. I’d just need to call Neil to let him know. Shouldn’t be a problem as long as he knows.”

“You call your dad Neil?”

“Not to his face.”

“Extension’s behind the bar.” Billy got up to find it. “Oh, ask him if their fridge is running too.”

“Asshole.”

Steve only caught an odd word of the conversation, but the tone of Billy’s voice was entirely different. He couldn’t put his finger on it, but it made him uncomfortable.

“So?” he asked as Billy rounded the end of the bar on his way back.

“Yes. I’ll stay if it’s still OK.”

“Good. And the beers?”

“What?”

“The beers. You were right at the fridge and you’re coming back empty handed.”

“Mea culpa”

“Here,” he handed the pizza to him, “stick this in the fridge for later.”

He came back with the beers and handed one to Steve.

“Mmm, cold pizza. We’re living it high in Hawkins.”

“You’re going to tell me that you’ve never eaten cold pizza from the night before.”

“Didn’t say that.”

“Thought so. You Catholic?”

“Huh?”

“‘Mea culpa’. That’s Catholic right?”

“My mom was a good Irish-Catholic girl, at least according to her. I use it, that’s all.”

He took a sip of his beer.

“You didn’t have to ask me to stay, you know.”

“If I didn’t want you to stay I wouldn’t have. There was no ‘have to’ about it. I mean I’m actually enjoying your company. I get the feeling you can make it easy if you want to, but that doesn’t happen often.”

“Yeah, well you aren’t half bad yourself.”

“So, how about you tell me about California. I’d like to go there one day.”

“Yeah, you probably just want to go to Disneyland and get a hat with mouse ears.”

“Is that where you got yours?”

“Watch it,” Billy laughed. “So, California.”

By the time he finished Steve knew a lot about more about California

than he had expected, but only a few scraps more about Billy; although he did talk about his mother a bit in passing and some friend named Danny. Steve sensed that Danny was important, more important than Billy was willing to let on. He'd hold that for another day.

"Alright, I'm talked out. You bored yet?"

"No."

They had stopped drinking a while ago and the buzz, while still there, was fading. They had also managed to eat some more of the pizza.

"It's almost midnight. Too bad it's winter," Steve said as he stretched and yawned. "We could have gone for a swim. There's always snow swimming of course."

"I know I'm going to regret this, but what's that?"

"If the snow's deep enough you strip down, dive into it and swim."

"What evil Indiana ritual is this? Something you do if you want to freeze to death."

"It helps if you're drunk and there's somewhere warm or a sauna nearby."

"Yeah. I think I would pass on that."

"Oh, before I'm done with you'll snow swim."

"I think I'd rather swim into a warm bed right now."

"Right." Steve stood up. "Follow me."

At the top of the stairs, Steve took him to the door at the end.

"Here you go." He flipped on the light. "Even got your own bathroom." He walked over and turned on the bedside lamp. "Need anything else?"

“No, this is great.”

“Door closed or not.”

“Open’s fine.”

Billy stripped to his underwear after Steve left and climbed into bed. He could hear him in the hallway going to the bathroom and coming back, then the house was silent. Turning on his back and putting his hands behind his head, he watched the pattern of light that reflected from the back yard onto the ceiling. He was glad Steve had asked him over; as strange as it seemed, it was the best day he had had since coming to Hawkins. No need to showboat, no need to try to impress, no need to be the one in control.

Steve lay awake for a while too. Billy was the last person he thought he would get along with; their history would never have predicted it. And yet tonight he found that once he let you past the façade, or at least peak through it, Billy seemed OK. There was also something more about him, something he couldn’t pinpoint, but it was something surprisingly sensual. He wasn’t ready to find out what that was. Yet.

In the middle of the night something woke Steve from his dream of snow swimming naked with Billy. He lay for a moment listening and heard it again, coming from Billy’s room. After waiting for a few seconds he got up to investigate, pulling on his boxers and padding quietly down the hall. He stopped at the door and looked in. There was enough light that he could see Billy thrashing about on the bed, mumbling loudly. He figured it was just a dream and was about to go back to bed when Billy sat bolt upright and shouted “No! Don’t”, making him jump.

“Billy, what the hell?”

“Who ... what do you want?”

“It’s Steve. You OK?”

“Yeah, yeah. I could use a smoke though. Got an ashtray.”

“Not up here. Down in the family room.”

“OK, thanks.” Billy got out of bed and walked toward him.

“You’re shaking. Are you sure everything’s alright?”

“Will be, once I get a cig.”

“I’ll come with you.”

“No, go back to bed. It’ll be fine.”

“No, I’m coming too. But unlike some,” he nodded towards him, “I need pants.”

Billy looked down. “Oh yeah, pants.”

When Steve got downstairs, he was sitting cross-legged on the sofa, ashtray in his lap, a throw wrapped around his bare shoulders.

“Want something to drink?”

“No, I’m ... maybe some water?”

“Coming right up.”

As he got them both water and added ice at the bar, Steve looked up at Billy. There was something definitely wrong, but he didn’t know what to say yet, or even if he could help.”

“Here you go.” He handed Billy the water and sat down beside him.

“You don’t have to stay with me, you know.”

“Even if I want to?”

Billy drained half the water and took a long drag on his cigarette before leaning back to watch the exhaled smoke drift to the ceiling.

“Thanks.”

“This isn’t the first time?” Steve asked tentatively.

“No.”

“Often?”

“Depends,” Billy sighed, “on what you mean by often.”

“Can I do anything?”

Billy shook his head.

“You’re doing enough by being here. There’s no one at home who would do that.”

“Your Dad? Susan?”

Billy shook his head again. “Neil tells me to shut the fuck up because he has to get up early. Susan keeps out of his way.”

“Not Max then?”

“She’s too young, besides I’ve been a dick to her why would she even if she could.”

“Want to tell me what it is?” Steve wondered if he was pushing too hard.

“Not now. Maybe some other time.” Billy half turned his head toward him. “That OK?”

“Sure.”

They sat in silence while Billy finished his cigarette then set the ashtray on the table.

“I’m going to just sit for a while if you want to go to bed.”

Steve shifted and propped his feet up on the table.

“I’m fine right here.”

Billy looked at him quickly again. He understood what Max had said about him being a good guy. It was as if all the shit that went down between them, all the stunts he had pulled, even the beating, didn’t matter now. *I don’t deserve it, but it looks like I really did get another chance.* He lit up another cigarette and settled back to stare at the

ceiling again.

Close to morning Steve woke disoriented, wondering why he was in the family room, stretched out on the sofa. Then he felt Billy's head against his chest and remembered. He looked down and saw the throw had slipped off him. Reaching over he pulled it back up, tucked it in and went back to sleep.

Notes for the Chapter:

Christmas Miracles took place on Christmas Day 1984. The Twelfth Day of Christmas is January 5, 1985.

3. Tobogganing

Summary for the Chapter:

What else do you do on a cold winter's day but go out in it to slide wildly down a hill. We don't get to see that part, but imagine California Billy on his first ride.

Notes for the Chapter:

Finally getting back to this. I think there's only one more chapter to come.

Steve opened the door to Billy, then stared at him for a few seconds.

“Get in here. Is that the only coat you have?”

“Yeah,” Billy answered defensively as Steve closed the door behind him. “So?”

“I’ll get you one of my sweaters.” He looked again. “And a scarf. And a hat. At least you have gloves and boots. They new?”

“Got them a couple of weeks ago. Finally couldn’t take walking through the snow in my sneakers. Anyway, what’s wrong with just my coat?”

“You’ll freeze your tits off. We’re going tobogganing not for a stroll on the beach.”

“Fine, fine. I still don’t get it though. You walk up a hill, you slide down, you walk up again. Freezing your nuts off, never mind your tits.”

“It’s called fun, Billy. You know what fun is, right?” Steve said as he pushed him toward the stairs so they could get the clothes from his room.

“Stupid way to have fun,” Billy groused as Steve pulled a sweater out of his drawer. “I’m not wearing that. Would you wear that?”

"It's mine isn't it? The idea, Billy," he said as he tossed it to him, "is to stay warm, not to worry if it looks like shit."

"All right then, you wear this," he threw it back and hit Steve in the face, "and I like the one you've got on. I'll take that."

"Jesus! Fine," he pulled the sweater off over his head and handed it to him. "Happy?"

"Happy isn't the word." He shrugged off his jacket and pulled it on, turning to look in the mirror. "Not bad. Got anything else you want to give me?"

"I'm loaning it to you, Billy." He smacked him on the ass. "Loaning. I expect it back."

"Sure."

Steve rifled through another drawer and pulled out a bulky wool hat and a scarf.

"Really," Billy held them up with disdain, "you want me to wear these too? You wearing something like them or am I the only one going to look like a fool?"

"Yes, you won't be alone. C'mon."

At the front closet Steve wrapped a long scarf around his neck, put on his coat and stuck a hat on his head, pulling it down over his ears. His hair stuck out wildly.

"There. How's that?"

"Yeah. I don't feel so bad now," Billy laughed as he followed suit.

"You're still not going to be warm enough. Want to take my other coat? It should fit over that sweater and it's a winter one too." He held it up. "It's older but it's still really good." Somehow Steve knew that Billy didn't have a coat because he had spent money on his boots so this was a way of getting around that.

"Well, if you think it's a good idea."

“I ...”

“Stevie?”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Don’t forget the hot chocolate. I made two of the large thermoses, and” she added as she came out of the living room, empty wine glass in hand, “there’s rum in one of them to help keep you warm. Hello, Billy.”

“Hello, Mrs. Harrington.”

“He roped you into this, did he?”

“I didn’t rope him into anything, Mom,” he said as he came out of the kitchen. “It’s winter. We always go tobogganing; a couple of times at least.”

“Yes, dear, I know. Have good time you two.” She wandered off down the hall.

“Stevie?”

“Shut it and put on your boots.”

“Stevie?” Billy repeated as they walked to the car.

“That’s at least her fourth glass of wine,” Steve answered as if that explained everything.

“So,” Billy asked, as they pulled away, “where’s the toboggan? I may not have ever been on one, but I know what they look like and I don’t see one.”

“Nance and Jonathan are bringing them. They’ll have Will and Dustin too.”

“I still think it’s sort of strange that you’re friends with them. I mean, you ex and her new boyfriend.”

“They’re OK.” Steve still hadn’t tried to explain about the Upside

Down and how the three of them were involved. *Fighting demons brings you closer apparently.*

Billy was quiet for a few seconds. "I thought we might get to be alone for a while." His hand strayed to Steve's knee.

"There's always back at my place later."

A lot had changed in the almost two months since Christmas and it all started the night they slept together on Steve's sofa. What had happened in the morning when they woke with Billy lying half on top of Steve, one leg straddling his, head tucked under his chin, had surprised both of them. But neither of them had been confused about what it meant and it hadn't taken long until they realised it wasn't going to be just about sex.

4. Winter Kept Us Warm

Summary for the Chapter:

And we end with fluff, of course

“Steve?” Eve Harrington made sure she was loud enough to carry up the stairs

“Yeah, Mom.”

“Come down here for a minute.”

Above her head she could hear loud clomping along the hallway followed by what sounded like a horse on the stairs. *Dear Lord, how can one boy be so noisy.*

“Yeah?” Steve asked as he skidded into the kitchen.

“I know you two won’t eat anything but pizza and that fried chicken concoction while we’re away for the next few days, so there’s money in that envelope.” She nodded to the corner of the counter. “But I did make a small casserole, the one Billy seems to like so much. It’ll be keep for at least three days if he wants some.”

“Good.” His mother wasn’t much of a cook, but she was right about Billy and the casserole.

“And remember, no parties. That busybody Cynthia Clawson will make sure we hear about it if you do.”

“I know, I know.”

“Eve, are you ready?” Steve’s father called from the front door.

“Yes, I’m coming.” She pulled on her gloves and buttoned her coat. “Billy spends a lot of time here.” She looked up directly into Steve’s eyes and he froze. “I take it things aren’t good at home?” Steve just nodded. “That’s too bad. Anyway, you know he’s welcome. Such a nice boy.”

As Steve watched her walk away he was glad she was only perceptive about some things. When he heard the door close he started to laugh. *Billy, a nice boy? I'll have to tell him that one.*

About ten minutes later Steve opened the door to let Billy in.

"Tell me something, Steve," he asked as he stomped the snow off his feet on the outside mat, "Spring started yesterday, right?"

"Yes."

"So, this snow, it'll be gone soon? Because I'm getting pissed."

"It's Indiana, Billy. Could start to go next week, just as likely there'll be some in April. It's a crap shoot, but the worst is over."

"You're a ray of fucking sunshine," he said as he tossed Steve his coat then pulled off his boots.

"Oh c'mon, your first winter wasn't all that bad."

"Ha!" Billy snorted as he followed Steve to the kitchen. "Define bad."

"You went tobogganing. Twice. You tried skating."

"How the hell did I ever let you convince me to make a fool of myself like that. I blame the borrowed skates for not being able to stay on my feet."

"Sure." Steve pulled two bottles of beer out of the fridge.

"My ass was sore for days."

"I don't think that was the only reason."

"Shut up," he laughed as Steve handed him a beer.

"You got to hold my hands in public."

"And Jonathan's. Let's not forget about Jonathan."

"We won't. We have the photos."

“Remind me to thank Nance for that. Sneaky.”

“You were too busy looking completely panicked to notice.”

“I was not panicked! I was ... uh, concentrating.” He took a sip of his beer as they moved to the sunroom and sat down on the sofa. “You know, I never would have done something like that before. Risk making a fool of myself, looking weak, in front of people. It meant I didn’t have control of what was happening. Too dangerous.”

Steve turned around on the sofa and lay down with his head in Billy’s lap, holding the beer on his chest.

“So was that good or bad?”

Billy thought for a few seconds.

“Good. But only because you were there. Somehow I didn’t care because you didn’t seem to care.” He sighed. “I used to think that people were always going to judge me, find me not good enough. Just like my dad does. I couldn’t do much about him, but I could make damn sure no one else had the chance. I was in their faces, making sure they knew who was boss, and I never put myself in situations where I thought I might not come out on top. It didn’t always work, sometimes I lost, but I usually found a way to work even that to my advantage. Let them enjoy it then rip them to pieces the next time around. ”

He leant down and kissed Steve.

“You know what the best part of this winter has been?”

“Nope.”

“You. Finding you. And the fact that you actually wanted me after all the bullshit. Are you blushing?”

“No... maybe.”

“It’s true though. Indiana’s a cold, snowy wasteland.”

He kissed Steve again.

“But you kept me warm.”

Notes for the Chapter:

I borrowed the title of this chapter from an almost-forgotten, gay-themed Canadian film from 1965 (in which I actually appear in a crowd scene - my fleeting 15 seconds of anonymous fame), which in turn borrowed it from Eliot's "The Waste Land"

Author's Note:

I couldn't for the life of me remember what games the kids played or even if I knew, so I went with my own list. Other than that I apologise for none of the feel good Christmas cheer :)